



ARISTOPHANES

The Clouds

CHARACTERS

STREPSIADES *an elderly farmer*

PHEIDIPPIDES *his son*

SLAVE

TWO STUDENTS *at Socrates' school*

SOCRATES *the philosopher*

RIGHT *an Argument*

WRONG *an Argument*

FIRST CREDITOR

SECOND CREDITOR

CHAEREPHON *the philosopher*

CHORUS OF CLOUDS

WITNESS *brought by First Creditor*

STUDENTS *at the school*

SLAVES *to Strepsiades*

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE: *Inside STREPSIADES' house. Two bedrooms are separated by a partition down the centre of the stage, with a door in it.*

[In one room PHEIDIPPIDES is sound asleep under an enormous weight of blankets. In the other STREPSIADES is restlessly tossing and turning. Finally he abandons all attempts at sleep and sits up with a yawn.]

STREPSIADES: Lord Zeus, how long the nights are! Will they never end? When will it be day? Come to think of it, I heard the cock ages ago. And the servants are still snoring! They'd never have dared to in the old days. Damn this war! One can't lay a hand on one's own slave now, in case he runs away to the enemy. Still, it's not only them: what about my dutiful son in there? Do you think he's going to wake up before it's day? Not he; he's still farting merrily away, wrapped up in his five blankets. Well, there's nothing for it: best cover up and try to get to sleep. *[He does so, but is soon sitting up again.]* It's no good, I can't. I'm being bitten all over by horses. And forkings out. And debts. All on account of that boy. He grows his hair long, rides around in his chariot and pair – do you know, he actually dreams of horses. Result, every time it comes to the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth of the month, I die of terror. That's the time when things grow on you – like interest.¹ Boy!

[A SLAVE appears.]

Light a lamp and bring in my accounts. I want to see how many people I owe to and how much the interest has got to now.

[The SLAVE goes out, and shortly returns with the lamp and a number of waxed tablets. He holds the lamp behind STREPSIADES while the latter consults the tablets.]

Let me see now: what have we? To Pasias, one thousand two hundred drachmas. What's that for? Let me think . . .

Oh yes, that was when I bought the horse with the Q brand.

Ha! Rather than that I should have been branded myself.²

PHEIDIPPIDES [*in his sleep*]: Watch it, Philon, you're cheating. Keep in your lane.

STREPSIADES: You see? That's what's ruining me. Even at night it's always horses, horses, horses.

PHEIDIPPIDES: How many laps is the next race?

STREPSIADES [*speaking at the door*]: I don't know, but not as many bends as you've driven me round. [*Looking at the accounts again*] Who came after Pasias? Mm – to Ameinias, three hundred for a small chariot – what's this? – complete with wheels.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Let him have a roll, groom, and take him home.

STREPSIADES: I can tell you what you've been rolling in. Money – and it's my money. Already because of you I've been dragged into court more than once and ordered to pay up or else. Now some of them are even threatening to have my goods seized if I don't. [*By this time he is shouting.*

PHEIDIPPIDES *stirs, rubs his eyes, gets up, shuffles sleepily to the door and pokes his head through.*]

PHEIDIPPIDES: Really, dad, what's wrong with you? Why do you keep tossing and turning and talking to yourself all night?

STREPSIADES: Oh, it's just something in the bed-clothes been biting me. A bailiff, I think.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Well, do let a fellow get a bit of shut-eye. [*He goes back to bed and is soon asleep again.*]

STREPSIADES [*with venom*]: Yes, you do that. But remember that all my debts will be yours one day! Gods, I wish I could

strangle the matchmaker who put the idea in my head of marrying your mother! I had a life without worries out in the country: none of your grooming or hot baths for me, no, I was happy with my bees and my sheep and my olives. Then I married this city girl, the niece of Megacles, no less, very classy – a right Coesyra!³ So I went to bed that night smelling as usual of bad wine, drying-racks, fleeces, profits, that kind of thing: while she positively oozed perfume and saffron, not to mention sex, money, sex, over-eating, and, well, sex. Don't imagine I'm saying she didn't ever do anything else. Oh, she could sew all right, though, as I used to say when I showed her my coat here, all she ever did sew was the seed of bankruptcy.⁴

[He gets out of bed and dresses. Just as he puts on the coat referred to – an exceedingly threadbare object – the lamp goes out.]

SLAVE: We seem to be out of oil in the lamp, sir.

STREPSIADES: Well, did I ask you to use the thirsty one? Come here – I'll make you regret it.

SLAVE *[making a dash for it]*: Why should I?

[STREPSIADES makes a grab at him but he gets away.]

STREPSIADES: *[calling after him]* Because you put in such a fat wick, that's why. What was I talking about? – Well, when me and my *[with heavy sarcasm]* very good wife had this boy, we had a great row about what to call him. She insisted on getting something into the name that would remind him of those damn horses and hippodromes – Xanthippus she liked, or maybe Charippus or Callippides. Myself I wanted to name him Pheidonides after his grandad. Well, we argued a lot, you know, until in the end we split the difference and called him Pheidippides. But that wasn't the end of the story. When she was holding him and fondling him she used to say something like, 'When you're a big boy and ride in procession to the Acropolis in your chariot, wearing a lovely yellow coat, like your Uncle Megacles ...' I did

what I could; when it was my turn, I said, 'No, my son, when you're a big boy and drive the goats home from the hills, like your daddy did before you, wearing your good old leather smock . . .' – but it was no good. He never took any notice of anything his father said. So now we've an epidemic here – horsitis. Well, anyway, I've been hunting all night for a way out, and I think I see one. Not easy, but wonderful if it works. If I can only get that boy to help, I think I'm saved! He! he! First, to wake him up. [*Goes into PHEIDIPPIDES' room. In a whisper*] Now what's the nicest possible way? Hm . . . [*Bending over PHEIDIPPIDES*] Pheidippides! My sweet little Pheidippikins!

PHEIDIPPIDES [*waking up, seeing that it is now daylight, and getting sluggishly out of bed*]: Wharrisiddad?

STREPSIADES: I want you to kiss me and put your right hand in mine.

PHEIDIPPIDES [*doing so*]: Okay. What's up?

STREPSIADES [*looking him full in the eyes*]: Tell me the truth: do you love your father?

PHEIDIPPIDES [*pointing to a statue in the corner of his room*]: I do, I swear it, by Poseidon the god of horses.

STREPSIADES: Please, not the god of horses! He's the one that's brought all this trouble on me. Well, dear, if you really love me from your heart – will you do something for me?

PHEIDIPPIDES [*getting irritated*]: What?

STREPSIADES: I want you to reform – to change your ways
[PHEIDIPPIDES, *who has heard this many times before, sighs audibly*]

– and go and learn what I'm going to ask you to.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yes, but what?

STREPSIADES [*anxiously*]: You'll do what I ask?

PHEIDIPPIDES: I will, I swear it by Po – [*hastily checking himself*] by – by – Di – Dionysus.

STREPSIADES: You know the house next door?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yes. What is it?

STREPSIADES: That, my son, is the Thinkery. For clever brains only, they say. It's where the scientists live, the ones who try to prove that the sky is like one of those round things you use to bake bread.⁵ They say it's all around us and we're -

PHEIDIPPIDES: And we're the lumps of coal, I suppose?

STREPSIADES: Exactly - you've got the idea. Anyway, if you pay them well, they can teach you how to win your case - whether you're in the right or not.

PHEIDIPPIDES [*guardedly*]: Who are these people?

STREPSIADES: I don't remember their name, but they're very fine - what do they call themselves? - philosophers.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Ugh! I know the buggers. You mean those stuck-up white-faced barefoot characters - like that bloody Socrates and Chaerephon.⁶

STREPSIADES: Really, you shouldn't talk so childishly! My boy [*emotionally*], if you care at all whether your poor father gets his daily bread, will you forget about horses for a bit and go and join them? Just for me!

PHEIDIPPIDES: I wouldn't, by - Dionysus, not if you gave me all the pheasants in Athens.

STREPSIADES [*on his knees*]: My - my beloved son - I beg of you - do go and study with them.

PHEIDIPPIDES: What am I supposed to learn?

STREPSIADES [*raising himself to his feet*]: They say they have two Arguments in there - Right and Wrong, they call them - and one of them, Wrong, can always win any case, however bad. Well, if you can learn this Argument or whatever it is, don't you see, all those debts I've run into because of you, I needn't pay anyone an obol of them ever.

PHEIDIPPIDES: No, I won't. How could I ever look my cavalry friends in the eye again, with a face looking like it had been covered in chalk?

STREPSIADES: Then, holy Demeter! you'll never eat any-

thing of mine again, not you nor any of your damn thoroughbreds. I'll throw you out of the house – you can go anywhere so long as it's hell.

PHEIDIPPIDES: I know Uncle Megacles will see I'm not without horse and home. Anyway, I don't believe you. [*He goes out of the room but, needless to say, not out of the house.*]

STREPSIADES: Come on, Strepsiades, this can't be the knock-out punch. Please the gods, I'm going to go to the Thinkery and get taught there myself. [*He wraps his old coat around him and goes out by a side passage down left. Scene Two follows immediately.*]

SCENE TWO: Outside the Thinkery. The stage is curtained, and there is a door down right, approached by steps.

[STREPSIADES enters by a side passage down right. At the bottom of the steps he hesitates.]

STREPSIADES [*to himself*]: How can I? How can I study all this logic-chopping and hair-splitting? I'm an old man; I never was brainy, and now I've hardly got any memory at all. [*Remembering something that seems to be an overriding consideration*] I've got to. No more dilly-dallying. [*He resolutely climbs the steps and knocks.*] Boy! My little boykins!

STUDENT [*from inside*]: Go to blazes! Who's that making all that racket?

STREPSIADES: Strepsiades is my name, son of Pheidon, from Cicyna.

[*The STUDENT, looking angry, comes out.*]

STUDENT: What kind of fool are you? Do you realize that by your violent and unphilosophical kicking of the door you have precipitated the abortion of a discovery?

STREPSIADES: I do apologize. I'm only a countryman. But do tell me, what was this thing that got aborted?

STUDENT [*mysteriously*]: It is not lawful to divulge it to non-members.

STREPSIADES: Well, that's all right. I want to join the Thinkery, that's why I've come.

STUDENT: Very well; but remember, your lips must be sealed. It was like this: Socrates just asked Chaerephon how many of its own feet a flea could jump – do you see? – because one of them had just bitten Chaerephon's eyebrow and jumped over on to Socrates' head.

STREPSIADES: Well, how did he find out?

STUDENT: He used a most elegant method. He melted some wax and put the flea's feet into it, so that when it set the flea had a stylish pair of slippers on. And then he took them off its feet and measured the distance out, like this, you see [*taking a step or two, toe touching heel*].

STREPSIADES: Gosh, what an intellectual brain!

STUDENT: Like to hear another?

STREPSIADES: Yes I would, please, do tell me.

STUDENT [*as repeating a story learned by heart*]: Chaerephon of Sphettus once asked Socrates whether he was of the opinion that gnats produced their hum by way of the mouth or – the other end.

STREPSIADES: Well, well, what did he say?

STUDENT: 'The intestinal passage of the gnat,' he replied, 'is very narrow, and consequently the wind is forced to go straight through to the back end. And then the arse, being a hole forming the exit from this narrow passage, groans under the force of the wind.'

STREPSIADES: Like a trumpet, you mean. I must say that's a marvellous feat of intestinology. I can see getting acquitted is going to be child's play for a chap who knows all there is to know about gnats' guts.

STUDENT: Then the day before yesterday Socrates was robbed of a great thought by a lizard.

STREPSIADES: How on earth did that happen?

STUDENT: Well, he was studying the path of the moon, or its orbit as we call it, and he was gazing up at the sky with his

mouth open, in the dark, you see, and this lizard [*trying to keep himself from laughing*] – this lizard on the roof shitted right in his face!

STREPSIADES [*half collapsed with laughter*]: Oh, I liked that one! The lizard shitted in Socrates' face! Ha! ha! ha!

STUDENT [*when he has recovered*]: And then yesterday, we found we had nothing to eat at dinner-time. So Socrates –

STREPSIADES: What did he bring off this time?

STUDENT: I was just going to tell you. He sprinkled a little ash on the table, bent round a skewer to serve as a pair of compasses, and then –

STREPSIADES: Yes, yes, what did he do then?

STUDENT: He whipped somebody's coat while they were wrestling.

STREPSIADES: And we still think Thales⁷ was the wisest man that ever lived! Come on, come on, open the door and let me see the great man now. I don't think my blad – I mean my brain can hold out much longer. Come on, open it up, can't you?

[*The STUDENT flings open the door. At the same moment the curtain rises revealing the interior of the stage, on which are a number of other STUDENTS, gazing intently at the ground – some bending over, some kneeling with their heads touching the ground, all motionless, utterly absorbed in scientific thought.*]

STREPSIADES: In Heracles' name, where did you catch these creatures?

STUDENT: What are you so surprised about? What did you think they were?

STREPSIADES: Spartan prisoners from Pylos,⁸ if you ask me. Why on earth are they all staring at the ground?

STUDENT: They are investigating phenomena under ground.

STREPSIADES: Roots to eat, you mean? Oh, you needn't worry about investigating for them; I know where you can find lovely big ones. But what about that lot [*pointing*]? They're completely doubled up!

STUDENT: Yes, they're examining the lowest reaches of hell.

STREPSIADES: That, I suppose, explains why their third eye [*poking one of the STUDENTS in the backside with his stick so that he falls over*] is looking at the sky! [*Very pleased with his own joke.*]

STUDENT [*rescuing the poked one; with perfect seriousness*]: That's right; we're teaching it to do astronomy all by itself, you see. Economy – one man, two jobs. [*To the other STUDENTS*] Go inside; what'll he say if he sees you out here?

STREPSIADES: No! – not yet! Can't they stay a bit? I want to tell them about a little problem I have.

STUDENT: Can't do that. Too much fresh air is very bad for the brain, you know – they mustn't stay outside any longer.

[*The other STUDENTS go into the school. They leave behind a number of instruments and a map.*]

STREPSIADES [*examining some of the instruments*]: What on earth are these things?

STUDENT: Well, this one's for astronomy, and that one's for geometry, and –

STREPSIADES: Geometry – what's that useful for?

STUDENT: Well – for – for – sharing out allotments of land, for example.

STREPSIADES: Oh, you mean in a new settlement?⁹

STUDENT: Any land you want.

STREPSIADES: That's delightful! I never heard of a more democratic invention.

STUDENT: And this, you see, is a map of the whole world. Look, here's Athens.

STREPSIADES [*inspecting the map*]: Can't be; if it's Athens, where are the jurymen?

STUDENT: No, I assure you, it is, and all this area is Attica.

STREPSIADES: Well, what's happened to my own village, Cicyнна?

STUDENT: It's in there somewhere. Anyway, here's the island of Euboea, look, lying stretched out opposite us, all along here.

STREPSIADES: Yes, I knew that already. It's been lying like that ever since me and Pericles and the rest of us knocked it out.¹⁰ Where's Sparta?

STUDENT [*pointing*]: Right here.

STREPSIADES: Too near, too near! You'd better have another thought or two about that – get it to be a heck of a lot further away from us.

STUDENT: We can't do that, silly.

STREPSIADES: Can't you? Then take that! [*He begins to belabour the STUDENT with his stick. As he does so SOCRATES swings into view like a god in tragedy, suspended in a contrivance like the gondola of a balloon. On seeing him STREPSIADES is so amazed that he drops the stick.*] Who in heaven's name is that hanging from the meathook?

STUDENT: Why, it's him, of course.

STREPSIADES: Him? Who's him?

STUDENT: Socrates.

STREPSIADES [*in religious awe*]: Socrates! Could you give him a shout for me?

STUDENT: No, I haven't got time, you do it yourself. [*Exit hastily and fearfully into the school.*]

STREPSIADES [*looking up at SOCRATES, who is now almost directly above him*]: Socrates! My sweet little Socrakins!

SOCRATES: Why call'st me, O thou creature of a day?

STREPSIADES: Well, for a start, I'd be very interested to know what you're doing up there.

SOCRATES: I am walking upon air and attacking the mystery of the sun.

STREPSIADES: Well, if you *must* attack the Mysteries of the gods why can't you do it on the ground?

SOCRATES: Why, for accurate investigation of meteorological phenomena it is essential to get one's thoughts into a state of, er, suspension by mixing small quantities of them

with air – for air, you know, is of very similar physical constitution to thought – at least, to mine. So I could never make any discoveries by looking up from the ground – there is a powerful attractive force between the earth and the moisture contained in thought. Something similar may be observed to happen in the case of watercress.

STREPSIADES [*scratching his head*]: I don't understand all this about thought attracting moisture to watercress. Come down to me, Socrakins, please do, and teach me what I've come for.

SOCRATES [*as his gondola is lowered to the ground and he climbs out*]: Well, what have you come for?

STREPSIADES: I want to be made an orator. Heartless usurers and creditors are laying me waste with fire, the sword, and bailiffs.

SOCRATES: How did you manage to get so much in debt without realizing it?

STREPSIADES: It was all because of a violent attack of a terrible disease called horsitis. But anyway, Socrates, will you teach me that Argument of yours – you know, that one that always pays off and never pays up? It doesn't matter what your fees are; I'll pay them, I swear it by the gods.

SOCRATES: Ah, but what gods? The first thing you'll have to learn is that with us the gods are no longer current.

STREPSIADES: Well, what *is* the currency you swear by? Iron coins like they have at Byzantium?

SOCRATES: Do you want to see with your own eyes the real truth about the gods and all that?

STREPSIADES: By Zeus, yes, if you can show me.

SOCRATES: And to talk face to face with the Clouds whom we worship?

STREPSIADES: Yes, please.

SOCRATES [*leading him over to a bed which stands only a few inches from the ground*]: Then first of all, please sit on the sacred bed.

STREPSIADES [*doing so*]: All right.

[SOCRATES *dances in ungainly fashion around the bed.*]

SOCRATES [*giving him a wreath of unattractive-looking vegetation*]: Now put this on your head.

STREPSIADES [*alarmed*]: What's this? You're not going to make a sacrifice of me, like Athamas in the play?¹¹

SOCRATES: No, this is just part of our normal initiation ceremony.

STREPSIADES: But what good will it do me?

SOCRATES [*who is taking some flour from a bag on the bed*]: You'll become a really fine-grained first-rate flowery speaker. Now keep very still. [*Begins to sprinkle the flour over STREPSIADES.*]

STREPSIADES [*trying to dodge the flour*]: You needn't think you can fool me – I'm becoming floury already!

SOCRATES:

Keep silence all, and hear my prayer.
O Lord, O King, O boundless Air,
On whom the earth supported floats,
And Ether bright, hear these my notes;

And you who send the thunder loud,
Almighty Goddesses of Cloud,
Behold your Thinker waiting here:
Arise and in the sky appear!

STREPSIADES [*hastily pulling his coat over his head*]:
Not yet, not yet, don't let them soak
Me till I'm covered with my cloak.
Why was I such a silly chap
That I forget to take my cap?

SOCRATES:

Come, holy Clouds, and show your power.
Come, leave your father Ocean's bower
(If there you be), or where Nile flows,
Or high Olympus crowned with snows

(If there you be) or Mimas' peak,
Or distant lakes in Scythia bleak:
Where'er you be, my prayers now hear,
Accept my offerings, and appear!

[*Silence. The CHORUS is heard singing in the distance.*]

CHORUS:

Rise, my sisters, Clouds eternal,
Shining bright with morning dew,
From the roaring Ocean's bosom
To the sky, the world to view.

p Let us see the distant mountains
And the holy earth below,
Where we irrigate the cornfields
And the babbling rivers flow,

ff While far off the breakers thunder
p 'Neath the sun's unwearied rays:
Make yourselves like human beings
And to earth direct your gaze.

SOCRATES [*recitative*]:

Almighty Clouds, you heard my
prayer indeed.

[*To STREPSIADES*] Mark'd you their voice, how like the
thunder 'twas?

STREPSIADES:

Their glory I revere, and in reply
I fain would blow a fart, I'm so afraid.
If heaven's law permits it – matter of
fact,
Even if not – I badly need to crap.

SOCRATES:

Jest not nor do as those comedians base;
The gods like bees are swarming: hark
again!

CHORUS [*nearer*]:

Come, my sisters, where Athena
Rules the loveliest land in Greece,
Where reside the glorious Mysteries¹²
That to troubled hearts bring peace;

Where stand lofty, beauteous temples
Full of gifts beyond all price;
Where no season lacks its share of
Festival and sacrifice;

Where they hold to Dionysus
Joyous feast at start of spring,
Hear the flute and hear the chorus
In melodious contest sing.

STREPSIADES: Who are those women who sing like the Muses themselves? Do tell me, Socrates. They're not ancestral heroines, are they, or anything like that?

SOCRATES: No, indeed. They are the celestial Clouds, the patron goddesses of the layabout. From them come our intelligence, our dialectic and our reason; also our speculative genius and all our argumentative talents.

STREPSIADES: Now you say that, I feel I could fly. I want to be a real subtle thinker, like you, and be able to split the thinnest hair going, and deflate my opponent with a pointed little argument and still have another up my sleeve for my own speech, and – Oh, I do so want to see these Clouds, if I can, Socrates.

SOCRATES [*pointing*]: Look over there, towards Mount Parnes. I can see them coming now.

STREPSIADES: Where, where?

SOCRATES: Yes, here they come through the glens and woods, a whole host of them – [*to STREPSIADES, who is looking vainly at the blue sky*] no, over *here*, coming in by the side.

STREPSIADES: What are you talking about? I can't see a thing.

SOCRATES: They're coming on to the stage now, for heaven's sake!

[*As he says this the CHORUS enter: unmistakably young women, but with dresses shaped and coloured like clouds.*]

STREPSIADES [*continuing to squint hard at the entry-way after they have passed*]: Ah yes, I see them now.

SOCRATES [*turning round STREPSIADES' head to face the CHORUS*]: So you should, unless you've got pumpkins where your eyes should be.

STREPSIADES: Yes – and how wonderful! The place is full of them!

SOCRATES: And you mean to say you didn't use to think they were goddesses?

STREPSIADES: Heavens, no – I thought they were mist, dew, smoke, vapour, something like that.

SOCRATES: Well, well! Then you can't have known that they nourish the brains of the whole tribe of sophists? No? And the prophets and teachers of medicine and other such dirty long-haired weirdies – anyone in fact, so long as he doesn't do any useful work? They're especially fond of writers of dithyrambs.¹³ For one thing, they see a lot of them, since those chaps never have a foot on the ground; and for another, aren't they always talking about clouds and things?

STREPSIADES: That's right, isn't it? 'Deadly lightning, twisted bracelet of the watery Clouds' – and 'Locks of the hundred-headed Typhon' – and 'Conflagrating storms' – and 'Airy nothings' – and 'Crook-talon'd birds, the swimmers of the air' – and – let me think – yes! – 'Showers of moisture from the dewy Clouds'. That's right! And for that rubbish they're feasted after the performance on – wait a bit – on vast conger-eels and thrushes' avian flesh!

SOCRATES: All thanks to these ladies, and quite right too.

STREPSIADES: Socrates – one thing I'm puzzled about. You did say these were Clouds?

SOCRATES: Yes.

STREPSIADES: Well, how come they look so like women?
The other clouds – I mean, well, the real ones, look quite different.

SOCRATES: Oh, how do they look?

STREPSIADES: Well, it's hard to say exactly – well, I suppose like fleeces when they're laid out to dry, but anyway, not in the least like women. And [*pointing to a member of the CHORUS*] I never yet saw a cloud with a nose!

SOCRATES: Ah, but look at it this way. You've seen clouds, haven't you, shaped like centaurs and leopards and lions and such like?

STREPSIADES: Yes – well?

SOCRATES: They can take any shape they fancy. So if they see a wild man walking around, one of those hairy sex maniacs, like what's his name, Xenophantus' son,¹⁴ well, they take their cue from him and turn into wolves.

STREPSIADES: And if they catch sight of someone who rifles the public funds, like Simon,¹⁵ what do they do?

SOCRATES: Turn into foxes, of course.

STREPSIADES: Ah, now I understand why they looked like deer yesterday! They must have seen Cleonymus¹⁶ and wanted to remind him how cowardly he'd been that time when –

SOCRATES: I think we know all about that, [*to the audience*] don't we? But you've got the idea; and anyway, they had one look at Cleisthenes¹⁷ just now, and naturally, on the spot, as you can see, they turned into women.

STREPSIADES [*to the CHORUS*]: Well, welcome, holy Clouds; I wonder if, just for me, you'd show me the power of your wonderful heavenly voices?

CHORUS [*in close harmony*]:

Hail, grey-headed hunter of phrases artistic!

Hail, Socrates, master of twaddle!

Out of all of the specialists cosmologicistic

We love for the brains in his noddle

Only Prodicus;¹⁸ you we admire none the less
 For the way that you swagger and cuss,
 And never wear shoes, and don't care how you dress,
 And solemnly discourse of us.

STREPSIADES [*in raptures*]: How fantastic! How divine!

SOCRATES: Yes, these are the only truly divine beings – all the rest is just a lot of fairy tales.

STREPSIADES: What on earth – ! You mean you don't believe in Zeus?

SOCRATES: Zeus? Who's Zeus?

STREPSIADES: Zeus who lives on Olympus, of course.

SOCRATES: Now really, you should know better. [*Confidentially*] There is no Zeus.

STREPSIADES: What? Well, who sends the rain, then? Answer me that.

SOCRATES: Why, our friends here do that, and I'll prove it. Have you ever seen it raining when the sky was blue? Surely Zeus, if it was him, would be able to send rain even when the Clouds were out of town.

STREPSIADES: That certainly backs your argument. I wonder why I was so naive as to think that rain was just Zeus pissing into a sieve. Well, that's one thing; but who is it that thunders and sends shivers up my spine?

SOCRATES: The Clouds do that too – when they get in a whirl.

STREPSIADES: I can see I'm never going to trip you. But what do you mean, a whirl?

SOCRATES: Well, being suspended in the air, you see, when they get swollen with rain they are necessarily set in motion, and of course they collide with one another, and because of their weight they get broken and let out this great noise.

STREPSIADES: 'Necessarily set in motion', you say. Ah, but who sets them in motion? Now *that's* got to be Zeus!

SOCRATES: Not a bit of it; as I say, it's a whirl in the sky.

STREPSIADES: Awhirl! – ah, I get you. That I must say I hadn't been told before. I get it. Zeus is dead, and now Awhirl is the new king. But you still haven't told me what causes the thunder.

SOCRATES: Didn't you hear? I said that it occurs when Clouds swollen with rain collide with one another, and is caused by their density.

STREPSIADES: Ha! Do you expect me to believe that?

SOCRATES: You yourself are a living proof of it. You have no doubt at some time – say, at the Pan-Athenian Festival – had a bit too much soup for dinner?

[STREPSIADES *nods guiltily.*]

Well, didn't that make your tummy grumble, not to say rumble?

STREPSIADES: It certainly does, straight away, a terrible noise, just like thunder. Gently at first [*imitates the noise*], then like this [*again, a little louder*], and when I crap, it really lets fly [*tries to imitate the noise again, but finds himself breaking wind in very truth*] – just like they do [*indicating the CHORUS*].

SOCRATES [*approvingly*]: Well, if a little tummy like yours [*pats it*] could let off a fart like that, what do you think an infinity of air can do? That's how thunder comes about. In point of fact, I happen to know that in Phrygian – the oldest language on earth – they actually call thunder 'phartos'.¹⁹

STREPSIADES: Very well: how about the thunderbolt? Tell me how that gets its fire – and hits us and burns us to a cinder, or maybe singes us alive – I don't know which is worse. Obviously that's Zeus' weapon against people who perjure themselves.

SOCRATES: Who are you, Methuselah? If Zeus strikes down perjurers, why hasn't he ignited Simon, Cleonymus and Theorus?²⁰ Why? [*Waits for an answer; protests from the audience.*] Yes, I know what I'm talking about. [*To STREPSIADES*] And why does he strike his own temple and his brother Poseidon's at Sunium, not to mention any number

of his own oak trees? Or have you ever heard of a perjured oak tree?

STREPSIADES: I don't know. But what you say does seem to make sense. What is the thunderbolt, in that case?

SOCRATES: It's when a dry wind in the sky gets shut up in a cloud. It blows it up like a bladder and the inevitable result is that it bursts; so the wind rushes out, owing to the density of the cloud, and the rapidity and violence of its motion cause it to set itself on fire.

STREPSIADES: Why, that's exactly what happened to me last month.²¹ I was roasting a haggis for the family, left it unattended for a time, and sure enough it got puffed up and – bang! – it plastered itself all over my eyes. I got a bad burn or two.

CHORUS [*to STREPSIADES*]:

If you're ready to work and your memory's good,
 If you've got the ability to think,
 If you laugh at the cold and at shortage of food,
 Wrestling, dice, sex, fresh air, even drink,
 If you honour the art of defeating your foe
 By stratagems deft of the tongue –
 Then we'll make you so smart that wherever you go
 Strepsiades' praise will be sung.

STREPSIADES: Well, nobody can say I'm not tough and can't stay awake at night thinking. And as far as a penny-pinching spartan digestion is concerned that is quite prepared to live on nothing but onions – I'm your man – here I am – get to work on me.

SOCRATES: I assume, then, that you now believe in only the gods that we believe in, that is, Chaos, our friends the Clouds here, and the Tongue?

STREPSIADES: I will never sacrifice or pour libation or burn incense to any other god. And if I met one in the street I wouldn't speak to him.

LEADER: Well, now that you're a worshipper of ours, you'll never come to any harm. Just tell us what you want us to do for you.

STREPSIADES: Just one tiny little thing, holy Clouds: I want to be the best orator in Greece – Strepsiadēs first, the rest nowhere.

LEADER: We'll see to that. In future there will be nobody carries more resolutions in the Assembly than you do.

STREPSIADES: Not resolutions, that's not what I'm interested in. I just want to be able to twist and turn my way through the forest of the law so as to give my creditors the slip.

LEADER: Well, that's certainly not much to ask. We'll see you get it. Just put yourself in the hands of our high priest here [*indicates SOCRATES*], have confidence, and we'll do the rest.

STREPSIADES: I have confidence all right. I've got to. It's the inevitable result [*glances at SOCRATES to show he is already picking up some of the jargon*] of horse force and wife pressure.

So I give myself entirely to the school – I'll let it beat me,²²

It can starve me, freeze me, parch me, it can generally ill-treat me,

If it teaches me to dodge my debts and get the reputation Of the cleverest, slyest fox that ever baffled litigation.

Let men hate me, let men call me names, and over and above it

Let them chase me through each court, and I assure you that I'll love it.

Yes, if Socrates can make of me a real forensic winner, I don't mind if he takes out my guts and has them for his dinner.

CHORUS:

If he has them for his dinner –

SOCRATES:

If I have them for my dinner –

ALL:

Yes, if Socrates, etc.

LEADER:

I can see you're not a coward, and you've got the
disposition

To become, if taught by us, a great and famous
rhetorician.

STREPSIADES:

This I really can't believe; is it the truth that you are
telling?

LEADER:

Men will stand all night in queues before the entrance to
your dwelling,

To consult you and to pick your brains and find a
quibble shifty

To escape from paying damages of forty thou. or fifty;
And so grateful will they be at winning by a margin
healthy

That in no long time your expertise will make you really
wealthy.

SOCRATES:

It will make you really wealthy –

STREPSIADES:

It will make me really wealthy?

ALL:

Yes, so grateful, etc.

LEADER: Time now, Socrates, to take your pupil through the
preliminaries. You must shake up his mind a bit, test his
intelligence.

SOCRATES [*to STREPSIADES*]: Tell me, what kind of a mind
do you have? I must know that in order to be able to bring
the latest devices to bear on your most strongly fortified
prejudices.

STREPSIADES: What do you mean? I came here to be edu-

cated, not to be besieged, and I haven't got any fortified precipices anyway.

SOCRATES: Don't be silly; I only want to ask you a few questions. Do you have a good memory?

STREPSIADES: Yes and no. Yes if somebody owes me something – no if I owe it to someone else.

SOCRATES: I see. Do you think you're a natural speaker?

STREPSIADES: No, not a natural speaker. A natural cheat, yes.

SOCRATES: Well then, how on earth do you expect to learn anything?

STREPSIADES: I'll manage.

SOCRATES: Well, anyway, if I put a choice bit of cosmology in front of you, I assume I can be sure that you will snap it up?

STREPSIADES: I'm not going to be treated like a dog!

SOCRATES [*aside*]: He's so stupid it's not true! [*To STREPSIADES*] I am afraid that in your education I may well be compelled to resort to the use of force. [*An anxiety strikes him.*] By the way, what do you do when you get hit?

STREPSIADES: Well, without an instant's delay I wait a little, and then raise a cry of assault, and then I wait a *very* little – like about two seconds – and go to law.

SOCRATES: All right; take off your coat, please. [*Lays his hand on STREPSIADES' coat.*]

STREPSIADES [*wriggling free*]: Why? You can't beat me. I haven't done anything wrong.

SOCRATES: I wasn't going to; but the rule is that no-one may enter the Thinkery wearing his coat.

STREPSIADES [*still clinging to the coat*]: What do you think I'm planning to do? Plant something here and then accuse you of stealing it?

SOCRATES: Oh, do stop talking nonsense and take the thing off.

[*STREPSIADES reluctantly complies, leaving the coat on the ground.*]

STREPSIADES: Tell me, if I'm a really hard-working keen student, will I become like your other pupils here?

SOCRATES: Nobody will be able to tell you from Chaerephon.

STREPSIADES: I might as well be dead in that case!

SOCRATES [*going to the inner door of the school, snapping up STREPSIADES' coat on the way*]: Will you stop blethering and get a move on in here?

STREPSIADES: I will if you give me a honey-cake to feed the snakes with. I'm frightened of going into that cave of yours.²³ [*Goes gingerly towards the door, eyeing the ground for snakes.*]

SOCRATES: Come in, for heaven's sake!

[*STREPSIADES goes in, followed by SOCRATES.*]

CHORUS:

Go in, brave pilgrim, and be sure
That Fortune will be gracious,
And blessing in profusion pour
On your attempt audacious.
Rejoice that, though advanced in years,
Your problems monetary
Have brought you here to learn ideas
Quite revolutionary.

[*The CHORUS advance and their LEADER addresses the audience.*]

I swear by Dionysus, my protector in my youth,
Athenians, that I'll tell you now the frank and simple truth.
So may I lose my wits and may I finish last again,
If I don't think my audience consists of clever men.
I thought that I had never written any play so witty
As this; that's why I let it first be tasted by this city.
A lot of sweat went into it; and yet this play retreated
By vulgar works of vulgar men unworthily defeated.

To all this trouble I went for you, and this was all your gratitude!

But you need have no fear that I will take a similar
attitude

To you, or ever let you down. For ever since the year²⁴
That certain persons praised the first of my productions
here,

The moral and immoral chap, *The Banqueters* I mean,
Which like an unwed mother I abandoned on the green
For someone to adopt²⁵ – and when the infant caught
your eyes

You kindly brought it up (and gave the play a worthy
prize) –

Well, at that time, as I submit, you made a promise sworn
To look with favour on all plays that might of me be born.

So here's my latest, like Electra²⁶ looking here and there
To find an audience that's a lock cut from her brother's
hair.

My Comedy's a modest girl: she doesn't play the fool
By bringing on a great thick floppy red-tipped leather tool
To give the kids a laugh, or making fun of men who're
bald;

Requests to dance a cordax²⁷ simply leave the lass
appalled.

And no old man with walking-stick applies a well-aimed
poke

In hopes to drown the groaning at another feeble joke.
No torches, shouts, or violence, or other weak
distraction:²⁸

She comes before you trusting in her words and in her
action.

And I am not a long-haired fop, nor yet a smooth-faced
cheat

Who pretends that something's new when it is really a
repeat:

I always think up new ideas, not one of which is ever

The same as those that went before, and all of them are clever.

I went for Cleon, hard and low, when he was at his height,

But only once: why punch when you've already won the fight?

But now you see Hyperbolus²⁹ is butt of all the others: They have him down, but still assail his weak spots and his mother's.

The first of them was Eupolis, the stinking thief, who bashed

Hyperbolus in *Maricas*,³⁰ which was my *Knights* rehashed (He also plundered Phrynichus, though on a smaller scale: A cordax and a drunk old woman gobbled by a whale).

Hermippus then and all the rest on one another's heels Kept on at him (and plagiarized *my* joke about the eels).³¹

If anyone still laughs at them, well, I can't say I mind
If fools like that to humour such as I provide are blind;
But if you now accept my work with ready ears and eyes,
Posterity will reckon you a generation wise.

CHORUS:

Zeus, thou almighty Ruler of the heavens,
Thee first we call, accept our dance, we pray;
Thou too who wield'st the stern and savage trident,
Lord of the Earthquake, hear our song today.

Father renowned who nourishest all creatures,
Ether, most holy, thee we also praise;
And him who drives the fiery solar chariot,
Mortals and gods refreshing with his rays.

LEADER:

We Clouds, my dear spectators, feel we must
Say that the way you treat us is unjust.
More blessings than all other gods we bring
To you; yet you make us no offering

Nor even pour libation. Just reflect
What care we take your city to protect.
Suppose you make a great strategic blunder:
Then we send omens bad, like rain or thunder,
And send you home while it's not yet too late.
Then, when you chose the fellow the gods hate,
The Paphlagonian trafficker in leather,³²
As general, we gave warning through the weather:
With knitted brow we thundered, lightning flared,
The moon forsook her path,³³ the sun declared
That, if that villain won, he'd quench his flame.
And you elected Cleon just the same!
But still the gods, although they cannot cure
Your foolishness political, make sure
You always get a second opportunity
To rectify your blunders with impunity.
What! you don't have this second chance, say you,
Now you've elected him? Oh yes, you do.
That shark takes bribes and public money steals,
Doesn't he, now? Well, catch him by the heels
And dump him in the stocks, and all will prove
Well for the state, despite your first false move.

CHORUS:

Thou who art throned on Cynthus' rocky summit,
Graciously hear us, Phoebus, Delian Lord;
Thou too, blest Maid,³⁴ who dwell'st in the Ephesians'
Temple of gold, by Lydian maids adored.

Thou our Protectress, wielder of the aegis,
Stay of this city, Pallas, hear our song;
Last but not least the reveller of Parnassus,
Bacchus, we call, amid his Maenad throng.

LEADER:

Before we started on our journey here
We met the Moon, who said she wished good cheer

To Athens and to all her allies true,
But had a bone or two to pick with you.
She says you wrong her, seeing she has blessed
You always in a fashion manifest.
For instance, each of you a drachma saves
Each month, which else you'd have to give to slaves
Torches to buy when you went out at night:
So much you profit by the lunar light,
And more; for which, she says, your thanks are scurvy —
You've turned the calendar all topsy-turvy.³⁵
And when the gods from meals are turned away
Because you've sacrificed on the wrong day,
It's her they blame — they make quite dreadful threats;
Meanwhile you squabble over little debts
And go to law on days which should be feasts
And working days for none except the priests.
On other days, when we in mourning fast
For some great fallen hero of the past,
You down on earth unseasonably rejoice.
Some of our ire we vented on your choice
As delegate to Delphi — you know who —
Hyperbolus: his wreath away we blew,
Hurting his pride to make him mend his ways
And teach you by the moon to count your days.

[*Re-enter SOCRATES from the school, looking exasperated.*]

SOCRATES: In the name of Respiration and Chaos and Air and all that's holy — ! I have never met such a clueless stupid forgetful bumpkin in all my life. The pokiest little thing I teach him, he forgets before he's even learnt it! Never mind, I'll see if a bit of daylight does him any good. [*Calling towards the door*] Strepsiades! Where are you? Can you bring your bed out here?

STREPSIADES [*from inside, grumpily*]: What with all the bugs it's walking back in again. [*He comes out carrying the bed.*]

SOCRATES: Come over here and put it down, and then pay attention.

STREPSIADES [*doing so*]: All right.

SOCRATES: Now what do you want to be taught first? Something that you haven't ever been taught before. Come on. Words? Rhythms? Verse measures?

STREPSIADES [*eagerly*]: Measures, yes, that's what I want to know about. Only the other day a corn-dealer cheated me with an oversized quart measure.

SOCRATES [*impatiently*]: I'm not talking about that. What measure do you consider the most attractive? Iambic trimeters? Trochaic tetrameters?

STREPSIADES: Well . . . let me see . . . I think I prefer the gallon.

SOCRATES: The gallon? What on earth are you blethering about?

STREPSIADES: I thought you said tetrameters. That means four, doesn't it? Well, I certainly prefer four quarts to three, if that's what you wanted to know.

SOCRATES: Damn your quarts, you stupid peasant. Let's try rhythms, perhaps you'll understand them better.

STREPSIADES: I will if they'll help me sell my corn.

SOCRATES: Well, I don't know about that, but you'll certainly be a better conversationalist, knowing what an anapaest is and a dactyl and all the other kinds of feet.³⁶

STREPSIADES: Come off it. I know all about feet already.

SOCRATES: Tell me what you know about them.

STREPSIADES [*waving his foot at SOCRATES*]: Why, this is a right one, and [*changing feet*] this is a left one. I've known that since I was a baby.

SOCRATES: Idiot!

STREPSIADES: Well, my good man, why should I learn about any of these things? I don't want to, anyway.

SOCRATES: Well, what *do* you want to learn about?

STREPSIADES: That arg – argument, the one you call Wrong.

SOCRATES: Ah, there are many other things you have to learn first. For instance, which animals are male?

STREPSIADES: Well, I know that, if I haven't gone potty. A ram, a he-goat, a bull, a jackass, a chicken –

SOCRATES: See what you do? You call the male and female by the same name 'chicken'.

STREPSIADES: Eh?

SOCRATES [*very slowly, as to a child*]: You just called the male 'chicken', and you call the female 'chicken' too.

STREPSIADES [*after some thought*]: By Poseidon, so I do. What ought I to call them?

SOCRATES: Say 'chickeness', and the male you can call 'chicker'.³⁷

STREPSIADES: Chickeness! Holy Air, that's wonderful! Just for telling me that I'll fill your trough with barley.

SOCRATES: Hold it again. You called it a trough. Much too masculine a name for such a feminine object.

STREPSIADES: What do you mean, a masculine name for a feminine object?

SOCRATES: Sort of like Cleonymus.

STREPSIADES: That foxy fellow, you mean?

SOCRATES: That's right: fox, trough, they're just the same.

STREPSIADES: But that's impossible. Cleonymus hasn't got a trough, masculine or feminine – he does his kneading with a round mortar [*illustrates his meaning with a handy implement*]. No, but what should I call a trough from now on?

SOCRATES: Well, as I was saying, it's just like a fox. Fox – vixen; trough – triffen.³⁸

STREPSIADES: Triffen will be feminine?

SOCRATES: That's right.

STREPSIADES: I've got it now. Triffen – vixen – Cleonymē.

SOCRATES: But you've still got to learn which names are masculine and which feminine.

STREPSIADES: No, I know which are feminine.

SOCRATES: Which?

STREPSIADES: Lysilla – Philinna – Cleitagora – Demetria –

SOCRATES [*interrupting*]: Yes; and which are masculine?

STREPSIADES: Millions. [*Thinks hard.*] Well, there's Philoxenus – and Melesias – and Alexander –³⁹

SOCRATES: Silly, they aren't masculine.

STREPSIADES: You don't think they are?

SOCRATES: Not a bit. If you met Alexander, what would be the first thing you'd say to him?

STREPSIADES: I'd say – I'd say 'Hullo, Sandie!'⁴⁰

SOCRATES: There you are; you've called him a woman.

STREPSIADES: And rightly too – the way *she* manages to dodge the call-up. But what's the point of my learning all these things? Everybody knows them already.

SOCRATES [*bitterly*]: There certainly doesn't seem to be much point in trying to teach you them. Now [*pointing to the bed*] just get in there –

STREPSIADES [*apprehensively*]: And?

SOCRATES: And have some thoughts about one of your own problems.

STREPSIADES: Please, not in there! If I must think, do let me lie on the ground and do it.

SOCRATES: I'm afraid there is no alternative.

STREPSIADES [*getting into the bed*]: You're sending me into the bugs' torture chamber, you know that.

[SOCRATES *goes into the school.*]

CHORUS:

Think closely, follow every track,
And twist and turn and double back,

[STREPSIADES *begins to writhe in agony.*]

And when you know not how
To come to a conclusion true,
Jump to another point of view,
And never sleep, but –

STREPSIADES:

Yow!!

CHORUS:

What ails thee, friend? Why criest so?

STREPSIADES: I'm being ravaged by a foe,
A vast Phlee-asian host;⁴¹
They've gnawed my ribs and now they'll
pass
To driving tunnels up my arse –
They'll make of me a ghost.

CHORUS:

Nay, bear it not so grievously.

STREPSIADES: That's fine advice to offer me!

In debt up to my brow,
Without my shoes, without my tan,
Uncertain if I'm still a man,
And tortured by these – Yowww!!!

[*He returns to his private agony. SOCRATES looks out of the door.*]

SOCRATES: Hey, what are you up to? Are you thinking or not?

STREPSIADES: Certainly I am.

SOCRATES: Well, what are you thinking about?

STREPSIADES: Whether when the bugs have finished with me
there'll be any of me left. Ouch!

SOCRATES: Oh, go to blazes! [*Goes back inside.*]

STREPSIADES [*calling after him*]: I'm not sure I'm not there
already. [*He moves as if intending to get out of bed.*]

LEADER: Now, now, don't be a coward: cover yourself up.
You've got to get yourself a few juicy ideas to cheat those
creditors.

STREPSIADES [*meekly retreating under the bedclothes*]: I wish
these bedclothes would produce one for a change – or even
a juicy something else, I wouldn't mind that either.

[*SOCRATES comes out.*]

SOCRATES: Let's have a look what this one is doing. [*Kicking
STREPSIADES through the bedclothes.*] You there, are you
asleep?

STREPSIADES [*muffled*]: No.

SOCRATES: Well, have you got anything yet?

STREPSIADES: No. [*By this time there is a remarkable bulge in the bedclothes.*]

SOCRATES: What, nothing?

STREPSIADES: Well, I've got my prick in my hand, if that's what you – No, I suppose you don't.

SOCRATES: Enough of that. Cover up and get thinking.

STREPSIADES [*sitting up*]: What about? Tell me that.

SOCRATES: You tell me what. Think of something you want to know about.

STREPSIADES: If I've told you once I've told you a million times. I want to know about interest – how not to pay it.

SOCRATES: All right; cover up, give your brain a little more play, and reflect on the matter. Make sure you draw the correct distinctions.

STREPSIADES [*pulling the bedclothes over his head*]: Yow! It's those bugs again!

SOCRATES: Now don't wriggle. And if an idea gets you into any difficulty, let go of it, withdraw for a bit, and then get your brain to work again shifting it around and weighing it up. [*He is about to go off when a shout calls him back.*]

STREPSIADES [*getting eagerly and thankfully out of bed*]: Socrates! Socrates, my very own!

SOCRATES: Yes, what is it?

STREPSIADES: I've got an idea for dodging interest.

SOCRATES: Tell me what it is.

STREPSIADES: Tell me –

SOCRATES [*after a moment*]: Yes?

STREPSIADES: Suppose I bought a Thessalian slave, a witch, and got her to draw down the moon one night, and then put it in a box like they do mirrors and kept a close watch on it.

SOCRATES: What good would that do you?

STREPSIADES: Well, if the moon never rises, I never pay any interest.

SOCRATES: Why not?

STREPSIADES: Why not? Because it's reckoned by the month, of course.

SOCRATES: That's very good. Here's another one for you. Say someone sues you for 30,000 drachmas. How do you get out of it?

STREPSIADES: How – do – I – I don't know. But I'd better find a way.

SOCRATES: Don't keep your thought penned up inside you all the time. Let it out into the air for a bit, keeping it under control, of course, like a yo-yo.⁴²

STREPSIADES [*after some thought*]: I've found a marvellous way of stopping that lawsuit. I think you'll think so too.

SOCRATES: Like what?

STREPSIADES: Have you seen that stone the druggists sell – the beautiful transparent one you can light fires with?

SOCRATES: You mean a burning-glass?

STREPSIADES: That's right. Well, suppose when the clerk is entering the case on one of his tablets, I stand like this with the glass between him and the sun and melt the wax where the particulars of the case against me are?

SOCRATES: Beautiful, by the Graces!

STREPSIADES: Whew! Glad I managed to strike that 30,000-drachma case off the list.

SOCRATES: See if you can get this one. You're the defendant – and you've nearly lost the case – and your witnesses are nowhere to be found. How do you get out of that one?

STREPSIADES: That's child's play.

SOCRATES: Go on.

STREPSIADES: Well – assuming there is still one case to be heard before mine – well, before they called on my case – I'd run away and hang myself.

SOCRATES: Oh, you're talking nonsense.

STREPSIADES: No, I'm not. Once I'm dead nobody can sue me.

SOCRATES: You just babble. Get out. I'm not going to teach you any more.

STREPSIADES: Oh, why? Do, please, Socrates, for the gods' sake.

SOCRATES: But look, anything you do learn you forget straight away. For instance, tell me now, what was the first thing I taught you?

STREPSIADES: Let me see now, what came first? – what – came – Knead – something we were kneading in – but what on earth was it?

SOCRATES: Oh, to hell with you, you amnesiac old fool! [*He walks furiously away, but remains in earshot during the following conversation.*]

STREPSIADES [*in despair*]: Gods, what will happen to me now? If I can't learn tongue-wrestling, I'm done for. Holy Clouds, can you give me any advice?

LEADER: Well, what we advise is this: do you have a grown-up son? If so, send him here to be a student instead of you.

STREPSIADES: Yes, I've a son, [*sarcastically*] a fine fellow. What am I to do, though? He doesn't want to learn anything.

LEADER: And you can't make him?

STREPSIADES: No. He's strong, good-looking, and descended from a long line of stinking rich women. Never mind, though, I'll go and get him; and if he doesn't come, make no mistake, I'll throw him out of my house. [*To SOCRATES*] Go inside and wait till I come back; I won't be long. [*Exit.*]

CHORUS [*to SOCRATES*]:

We only of the heavenly band

Look with grace on you:

This fellow's clay within your hand –

What you say he'll do.

Observe the way his heart's uplifted,

Make your profit fast;

For favouring winds ere now have shifted –

Luck don't always last.

SCENE THREE: *The street outside STREPSIADES' house and the Thinkery. The CHORUS are present as before.*

[STREPSIADES, *very angry*, comes out of his house, dragging a bewildered PHEIDIPPIDES after him.]

STREPSIADES: In the name of Mist, leave this house. Go and nibble at your uncle's pillared portico.

PHEIDIPPIDES: What on earth's happened to you, dad? Why, Zeus in heaven, you act like you were out of your mind!

STREPSIADES: Zeus in heaven! Hah! How stupid can you get? Believing in Zeus, a big boy like you! Ha! ha! ha!

PHEIDIPPIDES: What's so funny about that?

STREPSIADES: That you could be such a baby – so naive. Never mind. Come to daddy and he'll tell you something a grown-up needs to know. [PHEIDIPPIDES comes over, and STREPSIADES whispers, audibly, in his ear.] Promise you'll never tell this to anyone?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Promise. What is it?

STREPSIADES: You were swearing by Zeus just now, weren't you?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yes.

STREPSIADES: Well, now, isn't education a wonderful thing? Pheidippides – there *is* no Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES: No Zeus? Who's taken over?

STREPSIADES: Awhirl is king now; he's driven Zeus into exile.

PHEIDIPPIDES: What are you blethering about?

STREPSIADES: I assure you, it's perfectly true.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Who says so, anyway?

STREPSIADES: Diag – I mean Socrates,⁴³ and Chaerephon, you know, the expert on fleas' feet.

PHEIDIPPIDES: You believe nuts like that? You must be off your head.

STREPSIADES: Hush! I won't have anything rude said about

them. They're brilliant men and so sensible too – so frugal: they never do extravagant things like getting their hair cut or putting on oil, and they would never dream of taking a hot bath. You, you're never out of the bath – it's as if you were always getting ready for my funeral; except that I'm still alive, lad, and you're doing it at my expense. Now get along there quickly and let them teach you instead of me.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Huh! What that's any use can that lot teach anyone?

STREPSIADES: What a thing to ask! They teach you everything that's worth knowing. They'll soon teach *you* how dense and stupid you are. Here, just wait a moment, will you? [*Goes into the house.*]

PHEIDIPPIDES: Gods help me, my father really is mad. What am I going to do? Get the court to certify him, or just get in touch with the undertaker?

[*His reflections are interrupted by the return of STREPSIADES, followed by a SLAVE carrying two chickens, one male and one female.*]

STREPSIADES [*pointing to the male bird*]: Tell me now, what do you call this?

PHEIDIPPIDES [*in the tone of one who humours a lunatic*]: A chicken.

STREPSIADES: That's very good. And this one [*pointing to the other bird*]?

PHEIDIPPIDES: A chicken.

STREPSIADES: What, both the same? You *have* made a fool of yourself. You'd better not do it again. In future call this one a chickeness and the other one a chicker.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Chickeness? Was that the kind of bright idea you were taught in that creeps' academy?

STREPSIADES: Yes, and a great deal more too; but every time I was taught anything I forgot it straight away – I'm too old, Pheidippides, too old.

PHEIDIPPIDES: That's why you lost your coat?

STREPSIADES: I didn't lose it, I – I – thought it away. You get that? I thought it away.

PHEIDIPPIDES: And your shoes? What did you do with them, you old fool?

STREPSIADES: Oh, put them down as 'essential expenditure', Pericles style.⁴⁴ Come on now, let's go. Do what I ask you now, and in future you can do what you like, all right? I remember [*emotionally*] that I was already doing what *you* were asking me when you were a babbling six-year-old. I spent my very first obol of jury pay to get you a little toy cart to play with!

PHEIDIPPIDES: I swear you'll be sorry for this one day.
[*Reluctantly follows STREPSIADES over to the door of the Thinkery.*]

STREPSIADES: Good for you, my boy! Socrates! Come out and see what I've got! Here's my son. He didn't want to come, but I persuaded him.

SOCRATES [*coming out*]: I see. He must be immature. It's clear he doesn't yet know the ropes here.

PHEIDIPPIDES: [*under his breath*] I'd like to see you on the end of one.

STREPSIADES: Damn you, what do you mean cursing your teacher?

SOCRATES: Listen to his slack pronunciation – the drawl, the open mouth – did you hear? It's not going to be easy to teach him to win cases and make good debating points that don't actually mean anything. And yet [*reflectively*] for 6,000 drachmas, Hyperbolus did manage to learn it.

STREPSIADES [*much relieved*]: Fine, fine, teach him. He's really quite precocious. Do you know, when he was a little boy, so high [*indicating with his hand*], he was building toy houses at home, and ships too and little carts of figwood – and what do you think? – he made little frogs out of pomegranate peel! Well, anyway, see that he learns your

two Arguments, whatever you call them – oh yes, Right and Wrong – the one that takes a bad case and defeats Right with it. If he can't manage both, then at least Wrong – that will do – but that he must have.

SOCRATES: Well, I'll go and send the Arguments here in person, and they'll teach him themselves.

STREPSIADES [*calling after SOCRATES as he goes out*]: Don't forget, he's got to be able to argue against any kind of justified claim at all.⁴⁵

[*Enter RIGHT, dressed in the good old Attic style. He is followed by the smirking figure of WRONG, dressed similarly to PHEIDIPPIDES except that his tunic is embroidered with tongues.*]

RIGHT: This way. Let the audience see you. You may be brazen but you're not *that* brazen.

WRONG: Sure, go wherever you like. The more of an audience we have, the more soundly I'll trounce you.

RIGHT: Trounce me? What do you think you are?

WRONG: An Argument, like you.

RIGHT: Yes, a *wrong* Argument.

WRONG: Maybe, but I'll still beat you, Right though you call yourself.

RIGHT: What sort of trick will you use?

WRONG: Oh, just a few new ideas.

RIGHT: Yes, they're in fashion now, aren't they, [*to the audience*] because of you idiots.

WRONG: Idiots indeed! They're extremely intelligent.

RIGHT: Anyway, I'll wallop you.

WRONG [*unconcerned*]: How?

RIGHT: Simply by putting my just case.

WRONG: It'll crumble as soon as I open my mouth. Anyway, there isn't any such thing as Justice.

RIGHT: No Justice?!

WRONG: You think there is? Where is she?

RIGHT: Where the gods are, of course.

WRONG: Very well; in that case, why didn't she destroy Zeus for putting his father in chains?⁴⁶

RIGHT: Ugh, you make me puke. A bowl, somebody!

WRONG: You're just a fogbound out-of-tune old bag-pipe.

RIGHT: And you're just a shameless out-of-condition young bugger.

WRONG: I'm terribly flattered.

RIGHT: And a pickpocket.

WRONG: Another bouquet! No, I mean it.

RIGHT: And what's more, you beat your father.

WRONG: You know, you're showering me with gold.

RIGHT: Lead, more like – at least my generation would have thought so.

WRONG: To mine all those words you used are really exquisite compliments.

RIGHT [*disgusted*]: You're the absolute limit.

WRONG: And you're the absolute prehistoric survival.

RIGHT: You're the one that teaches our teenagers not to go to school. One day Athens will wake up to what you've been doing to our youth.

WRONG [*sniffing*]: Do you ever wash?

RIGHT: You're not doing so badly, are you? Considering you used to be a beggar, pretending to be that Mysian Telephus⁴⁷ and living on little scraps of ideas you got from your bag and shared with every down-and-out in Athens.⁴⁸

WRONG: Yes, wasn't I clever?

RIGHT: Yes, weren't you mad? And madder yet the city that bred you to ruin its own youth.

WRONG: You don't mean to be this boy's teacher, do you, Methuselah?

RIGHT: Yes, I do, if he wants to be made a decent person and know how to do something besides talk.

WRONG [*to PHEIDIPPIDES*]: Come here and leave him to rant.

RIGHT: Lay a hand on him and I'll wallop you! [*Rushes at WRONG, but is restrained by the LEADER.*]

LEADER:

Cease your wrangling now, I pray;
 Tell us, Right, the way you taught
 Athens' boys in bygone years;
 You then, Wrong, will have your say,
 Give this lad some food for thought,
 Make him marvel as he hears.
 When he's heard your clashing views,
 He himself his path will choose.

RIGHT [*recitative*]:

To this proposal I agree.

WRONG:

And I.

LEADER: But which will open this debate momentous?

WRONG:

He can start for all I care;
 Doesn't matter how he speaks,
 Modern thought will clip his wings.
 Yes, I promise, if he dare
 Say one word, his eyes and cheeks
 I'll make black with hornet-stings
 Made of words – so just you wait!
 I'll consign him to his fate.

CHORUS:

As you battle in words and in thoughts of the mind,
 Let us see which is better and which lags behind;
 We're concerned in this contest for Socrates' sake;
 For the future of Learning, no less, is at stake.

LEADER:

Now, you who fostered by your education
 The glorious old traditions of our nation,
 Break into speech with Aeschylean voice,
 Explain why you should be this stripling's choice.

RIGHT: I'll tell you about the way boys were brought up in the old days – the days when I was all the rage and it was actually fashionable to be decent. First of all, children were supposed to be seen and not heard. Then, all the boys of the district were expected to walk together through the streets to their music-master's, quietly and decorously, and without a coat, even when it was snowing confetti – and they did. And when they got there he made them learn some of the old songs by heart – like 'Pallas, great sacker of cities' or 'Let the glad chorus re-echo' – singing them to the traditional tunes their fathers used, and on *no* account pressing their thighs together. And if any of them did anything disreputable such as putting in chromatic bits, all tied up in knots, the sort Phrynus⁴⁹ introduced and they all do now, why, he was given six of the best for insulting the Muses. Then in the gymnasium, when they sat down, they were expected to keep their legs well up, so as not to – so as not to torment us with desire; and when they got up, to smooth down the sand, so as not to leave any lovely – I mean provocative marks on it for their lovers to gaze at. What's more, [*sternly*] they never put on oil below the belt, [*dreamily*] and their pricks looked like peaches, all velvety and dewy and – [*recollecting who he is*] and you didn't see a boy being his own pimp, walking along making eyes at his lovers and putting on a beautiful soft voice, oh no! They weren't allowed to grab the best vegetables at dinner either, like the dill and parsley – those were always reserved for their elders and betters. In fact they ate no fancy stuff at all. And they never giggled, they never stood like this with one foot over the other, and they never –

WRONG: How very archaic! How quaint! How fit for history's dustbin, along with boring minor festivals, grasshopper brooches, and Ceceides!⁵⁰

RIGHT: Yes, you can laugh. But that's the sort of discipline that I used to rear the men who fought at Marathon. What

does *your* kind do for our young men? They wrap themselves in coats these days up to the eyebrows. And when I saw one of them in the Pan-Athenian dance,⁵¹ so feeble he let his shield drop to his haunches, why, I nearly choked – the insult to our beloved goddess! [*To PHEIDIPPIDES*] So choose Right, my lad, choose me, you can be sure of success. Keep away from the Market Square, and the public baths too. Be ashamed when you ought to be ashamed. Turn bright red when people make fun of you. Stand up when someone older than you comes in. Respect your parents. Don't do anything disgraceful or fly in the face of the great goddess Modesty. Don't run after dancing-girls; you never know what may happen – suppose some little whore chucks an apple at you as a come-and-get-me? – your reputation's gone in an instant. Don't ever contradict your father or call him an antediluvian; he brought you up before you could fly by yourself; be grateful.

WRONG: Watch out, lad! If you listen to him, Dionysus knows, you'll end up just like Hippocrates' sons and be called a vegetable, and rightly too.

RIGHT: Don't take any notice of him. Spend your time in the gymnasium – get sleek and healthy. You don't want to be the sort of chap who's always in the Market Square telling stories about other people's sex lives, or in the courts arguing about some piffling quibbling filthy little dispute. No, you'll run off to Academe's Park and relax under the sacred olive trees, a wreath of pure white flowers on your head, with a decent well-mannered companion or two; [*almost lyrical*] and you'll share the fragrance of leafy poplar and carefree convolvulus, and the joys of spring, when the plane tree whispers her love to the elm!

If my sound advice you heed, if you follow where I
lead,

You'll be healthy, you'll be strong and you'll be sleek;

You'll have muscles that are thick and a pretty little
prick –

You'll be proud of your appearance and physique.

If contrariwise you spurn my society and turn

To these modern ways, you'll get a pale complexion,
And with two exceptions, all of your limbs will be too
small –

The exceptions are the tongue and the e-lection;

You will sing the trendy song, 'Wrong is right and right
is wrong,

There's no difference, there's no Justice, there's no
God',

And you'll catch the current craze for Antimachus'⁵²
ways –

Or in plainer language, you'll become a sod.

CHORUS:

O how sweet are your words and how modest your
thought!

How we envy the happiness of those whom you taught!

[To WRONG]

He impresses us so, we advise you to choose

Your best armaments verbal, your sexiest Muse.

LEADER:

Come, Wrong, and set your wits to win this fight

Against the argument we've heard from Right;

You'll need the newest weapons of your school,

Or else you'll be the butt of ridicule.

WRONG: Don't worry, ever since he began his speech I've
been bursting to blow it to bits. That's why the people here
at the Thinkery call me Wrong; I was the one who in-
vented ways of proving anything wrong, laws, prosecutors,
anything. Isn't that worth millions – to be able to have a
really bad case and yet win? Well, let's have a look at this

educational system you're so proud of. We'll dispose of it pretty quickly. For example, you say you won't let him have any hot baths. What have you got against them?

RIGHT [*dogmatically*]: Hot baths cause cowardice.

WRONG: Hold it, I've got you first time, and there's no wriggling away. Tell me, of the sons of Zeus, who would you say was the bravest man and performed the greatest number of labours?

RIGHT: Well, obviously Heracles.

WRONG: And have you ever heard of Heracles having a *cold* bath?⁵³

[RIGHT *is speechless.*]

Well, was he the bravest of them all, or wasn't he?

RIGHT [*spluttering*]: He's – he's – he's just like all the young men! They always say that sort of clever thing, at least they think it's clever, and flock to the public baths and leave the wrestling-schools empty.

WRONG: Then you object to their hanging around the Market Square. Why, don't you know that for Homer the word 'marketeer' is a term of praise – he applies it to Nestor and all his other fountains of wisdom?⁵⁴ How can it possibly be a bad thing? And the tongue – you say it's bad for the young to exercise it too much; well, I refute that. And then he talks about modesty or decency or something – another curse of our time! Come on, prove me wrong; tell me of anything good that your modesty or decency has ever done.

RIGHT: Well – that was what got Peleus his knife in the story.⁵⁵

WRONG: A knife! Well, well! What a rich haul, I must say! Even Hyperbolus, the lamp man – yes, I must admit, even if his crimes *have* made him a mint – he never got a knife! Poor fellow!

RIGHT: You know that's not all. It was because of Peleus' virtue that Thetis married him.

WRONG: Yes, and that was why she deserted him as well. If

he'd been a bit less virtuous he might have been a more satisfactory performer under the blankets. Women do *like* a man who shows a bit of imagination in bed, you know, Methuselah! [*To PHEIDIPPIDES*] Listen to all the things that virtue can't do for you, my lad – all the pleasures you'll forfeit. No boys. No women. No gambling. No fancy stuff to eat. No booze. No belly laughs. Could you live without all these? [*PHEIDIPPIDES shakes his head.*] I thought not. Let me turn now to – to the demands of Nature. Suppose you fall in love with a married woman – have a bit of fun – and get caught in the act. As you are now, without a tongue in your head, you're done for. But if you come and learn from me, then you can do what you like and get away with it – indulge your desires, laugh and play, have no shame. And then supposing you do get caught with somebody's wife, you can say to him, cool as a cucumber, 'What have I done wrong? Look at Zeus; wasn't he always the slave of his passions, sexwise? And do you expect a mere mortal like me to do any better than a god?'

RIGHT: Ah, but suppose the man doesn't take any notice? Suppose he starts applying the carrot and ashes treatment? Then you'll have bugger's arse for the rest of your life. [*To WRONG*] Get out of that one, clever guy!

WRONG: Why, what is there to get out of?

RIGHT: Well, I mean, being taken for a bugger – what could be worse than that?

WRONG: Suppose I prove you wrong about this, will you admit defeat?

RIGHT: Certainly I will – if you can.

WRONG: Very well then. Not to use your crude language – would you say our advocates, for example, are, or are not, on the whole, well, gay?

RIGHT: Yes, they are.

WRONG: I agree with you. And our poets – tragic ones, I mean, of course?

RIGHT: Yes, they're – gay too.

WRONG: Right again. What about our politicians?

RIGHT: Them too.

WRONG: Then don't you see you were talking nonsense?

Why, look at the audience; what do you think most of them are?

RIGHT: I'm looking.

WRONG: And what do you see?

RIGHT: Good gods, the bug – the gay ones have it! At least, I know *he* is [*pointing*] and him, and him there with the long hair. Heavens, they're almost *all* gay!

WRONG: Well then?

RIGHT: You win. [*To the audience*] Hey, you sods out there! I'm deserting – I'm going over to your side – [*throws his coat at STREPSIADES and PHEIDIPPIDES*] here, for the gods' sake, take this, will you? [*Rushes off the stage and accidentally-on-purpose lands in the arms of one of the gentlemen he has just pointed out.*]

WRONG [*to STREPSIADES*]: Well, now, which do you want – shall I take your son, or do you want to be taught yourself?

STREPSIADES: Oh, teach him – give him a bit of stick, he could do with it – but in any case, make sure you give his teeth a good cutting edge. I want him to be able to get a snap victory in a small case or two with the left side of his mouth and leave the right side free for the bigger ones.

WRONG: All right; I promise you, when you get him back, he'll be a real genius.

PHEIDIPPIDES: All I know is I'll be a real bloody paleface.

CHORUS [*as WRONG leads PHEIDIPPIDES into the school and STREPSIADES turns towards his house*]:

Farewell; [*to STREPSIADES*] but I divine that soon
You'll sing a less ecstatic tune.

You've sowed the wind, and we can see
Your harvest will the whirlwind be.

[STREPSIADES, taking no notice, dances into his house in an ecstasy of joy. The LEADER watches him till he is out of sight, then advances and addresses the audience.]

We would like to tell you, judges, of the blessings we'll accord

Those who give to both this chorus and this play their just reward.

If you want to put the ploughshare to some fallow land you've got,

Then we'll see that even in time of drought there's rain upon your plot.

If you keep a vineyard, we'll protect it from the double bane

Both of soaking with too much and parching with too little rain.

But if any mortal treats the Clouds of heaven with despite,

We have power to reduce him to a miserable plight;

Both his olives and his vines and all his other crops will fail:

From our powerful slings we'll smite them with those missiles you call hail,

Which we'll also do in case he builds a house: we'll give him proof

Of our anger by destroying every tile upon his roof.

And if he should give a wedding for a friend or a relation,

We will ruin the festivities with our precipitation:

Then just watch him as he beats his breast and penitently sighs

'Would to heaven I were in Egypt⁵⁶ – or had given *The Clouds* first prize!'

ACT TWO

SCENE: *The same, several weeks later.*

[Enter STREPSIADES, from his house, anxiously counting the days on his fingers.]

STREPSIADES: Twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth – four more days before it comes to that day I fear and hate above all others, the last day of the month, 'Old and New'!⁵⁷ All my creditors have taken the oath, paid their deposits into court, and now say they're going to get me. I ask them for a reasonable little favour or two – 'Please don't call the loan in now' – 'Give me some more time' – 'Couldn't we forget it?' – and so on – but they all say that's not their idea of getting paid and call me a villain and say they'll sue. [*Changing his mood*] Well, let them. If Pheidippides has been properly taught, they can't hurt me. I'll soon know if he has been. [*Knocking on the school door.*] Boy! Here, I say! Boy! [*As he delivers another thunderous knock* SOCRATES opens the door and STREPSIADES falls flat on his face.]

SOCRATES [*helping him to his feet*]: Glad to see you, StrepsiaDES.

STREPSIADES: Same to you. [*Producing a tattered tunic*] I wonder if you'd accept this? Just as a token of my appreciation. But my son – has he learnt that Argument we were listening to a moment ago?

SOCRATES: Yes, he has.

STREPSIADES: Holy Fraud, how wonderful!

SOCRATES: Yes, you'll be able now to win any case at all.

STREPSIADES: Even if the witnesses were actually there when I was borrowing the money?

SOCRATES: Even if there were a thousand of them.

STREPSIADES [*adopting a tragic pose*]:

Then raise aloft the cry of long-sought joy!
 I triumph! Weep, ye moneylenders, weep,
 Yourself, your capital, and your interest's interest!
 No longer can ye work on me your mischief,
 Such is the son that's reared within my house,
 A shining star wielding a two-edged tongue,
 My shield and guardian, saviour of my fortunes,
 Bane of my foes, disperser of my griefs!
 Run, run, and bring him forth from out thy halls.
 [SOCRATES goes into the school.]

Thy father calls, beloved son; appear.

SOCRATES [*re-emerging with PHEIDIPPIDES*]:⁵⁸

Behold your offspring.

STREPSIADES: Beloved boy!

SOCRATES: Good-bye and thank you.

STREPSIADES [*dancing, embracing his son, etc.*]:

Unmingled joy!

[SOCRATES goes into the school. STREPSIADES has a good look at PHEIDIPPIDES and lets out a cry of rapture.]

STREPSIADES: What a gorgeous complexion, son! You've got 'Not guilty' written all over your face – and your cheeks have that special Athenian bloom – grows nowhere else – the did-you-really-mean-that. I can see injured innocence shining out next time you're caught red-handed! Now at last you can be some use to your old father. You were his ruin; now be his salvation.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Why, what are you afraid of?

STREPSIADES: The last day of the month – Old and New.

PHEIDIPPIDES [*with mock naivety*]: What, you mean there's a day that's (a) old and (b) new?

STREPSIADES: Of course there is – and that's when everyone says they're going to pay their deposits into court.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Well, they're going to lose their money. It's not possible for one day to be two days.

STREPSIADES: How not possible?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Not unless it's possible for the same woman to be (a) old and (b) young at the same time.

STREPSIADES: Still, that's what the law says – to put down the deposits on the Old and New.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Ah, you see, people don't understand what the law is aimed at.

STREPSIADES: Well, what is it aimed at?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Well, our lawgiver Solon was a good democrat, right?

STREPSIADES: Yes, but I don't see what that has to do with the Old and New.

PHEIDIPPIDES: So he fixed the summonses for *two* days – the Old, you see, and the New – with the intention that the deposits should be put in on the second of those days – that is, the *New Moon* – the first of the month.

STREPSIADES: Well, in that case, why mention the Old at all?

PHEIDIPPIDES: To give the defendant a day to reach a settlement; then if he failed he could always get a stomach-ache or something on the morning of the New Moon.

STREPSIADES [*still not convinced*]: Then why on earth don't the magistrates accept the deposits on the New Moon? They only take them on the day before.

PHEIDIPPIDES: They're acting like the people who taste the food for festivals. They always do that on the day before the festival starts, right? So the magistrates, in order to make away with as much of the deposit money as possible – as quickly as possible –

STREPSIADES: I see! Here [*to the audience*], why are you poor blighters out there just sitting like stones, not even laughing? Ah, they're just fodder for us clever ones – we can treat them like sheep. But I do wish they wouldn't be quite such a

heap of earthenware. Well, anyway, the two of us have never had it so good, and I think someone ought to write a song about it. Like this.

‘How happy is Strepsiades,
How wondrous wise his sonny!’
So all will say when your brave tongue
Has saved for me my money.

Come home. This is an occasion to celebrate! [*They go into STREPSIADES’ house.*]

[*Enter FIRST CREDITOR and WITNESS.*]

FIRST CREDITOR: Why should anyone want to make a loan? Better to harden one’s heart at the outset rather than have all this trouble afterwards. Here I am, having to drag you into my problems because I need a witness, and having to make an enemy in my own deme. Well, I must not put Athens to shame. [*Knocks*] Strepsiades!

STREPSIADES [*coming out*]: Who’s there?

FIRST CREDITOR: I summon you to appear in court on the Old and New.

STREPSIADES: Witness everybody, that he named *two* days. — What about?

FIRST CREDITOR: The twelve hundred drachmas you borrowed to buy the ash-coloured horse.

STREPSIADES: Horse! Hark at that! And me that hates everything to do with horses!

FIRST CREDITOR: You know you borrowed it, and you gave an oath that you would pay.

STREPSIADES: Ah, well, that was before Pheidippides had learnt his invincible Argument.

FIRST CREDITOR: And now he has, you intend to refuse to pay?

STREPSIADES: Well, you don’t think I sent him to school for nothing, do you?

FIRST CREDITOR: Are you prepared to swear by the gods, in a place of my choice, that you do not owe me the money?

STREPSIADES: Swear by which gods?

FIRST CREDITOR: Zeus, Hermes and Poseidon.

STREPSIADES: Delighted. I'd give you three obols to be allowed to.

FIRST CREDITOR [*purple-faced*]: Well, of all the shameless –!

STREPSIADES [*poking him in the stomach*]: You know, you'd make quite a good wine-skin if we salted you.

FIRST CREDITOR: I'll –

STREPSIADES: Four gallons it would hold, I think.

FIRST CREDITOR: By Zeus and all the gods, you'll pay for this.

STREPSIADES [*feigning uncontrollable laughter*]: Oh, oh, the gods – and Zeus – ! How funny the way you swear – for those of us in the know!

FIRST CREDITOR: You'll pay for this, never fear. And I'm not going till you tell me whether I can expect to get my money back.

STREPSIADES: Wait a moment and I'll tell you. [*Goes into the house.*]

FIRST CREDITOR [*to WITNESS*]: What do you think he's going to do? Pay, or what?

STREPSIADES [*returning with a kneading-trough*]: Where's the man who was demanding that money from me? [*To*

FIRST CREDITOR] Look, what's this?

FIRST CREDITOR: That? A trough, of course.

STREPSIADES: And an ignorant person like you dares to ask me for money? Do you expect me to pay so much as an obol to someone who thinks a triffen is called a trough?

FIRST CREDITOR: So you're not going to pay?

STREPSIADES: You'll have to steal it if you want it. Now clear off, will you? Get away from my door! Hurry up!

FIRST CREDITOR: All right, I'm going. But let me tell you, I'm going to see you in court or be damned.

STREPSIADES [*as FIRST CREDITOR and WITNESS leave*]: Then you'll lose your deposit as well; and I wouldn't like that to happen to you just because you didn't know what to call a triffen.

[*Enter SECOND CREDITOR, dusty, with a limp.*]

SECOND CREDITOR: Alas! Alas!

STREPSIADES: Who's this singing laments? Not one of Carcinus' gods,⁵⁹ is it?

SECOND CREDITOR:

Why wishest thou to know who I may be?

I am a man of sorrows.

STREPSIADES: Well, keep them to yourself – I don't want to catch them.

SECOND CREDITOR:

O cruel goddess, O my chariot smashed!

Pallas, thou hast destroyed me utterly.⁶⁰

STREPSIADES: Why, what has Tlepolemus ever done you wrong?

SECOND CREDITOR:

Mock not at me, but bid thy son repay

The cash he borrowed of me, as is just

Especially in my present low estate.

STREPSIADES: What's all this about money?

SECOND CREDITOR: The money, I tell you, the money he borrowed.

STREPSIADES [*in mock sympathy*]: You *are* in a bad way.

SECOND CREDITOR: Yes, by the gods, I fell off my chariot.

STREPSIADES: The way you blether suggests what you fell off was the proverbial donkey.⁶¹

SECOND CREDITOR: Blether?! All I want is my money.

STREPSIADES: I'm sure you're ill. Had your brain shaken up, probably.

SECOND CREDITOR: *I'm* sure, by Hermes, that I'll sue if you don't pay.

STREPSIADES: Tell me now: do you think that when Zeus

rains, it's new rain every time, or do you think the sun sucks up water from the ground so that he can use it again?

SECOND CREDITOR: I don't know and I don't care.

STREPSIADES: What right have you to be paid, if you don't know any meteorology?

SECOND CREDITOR: Are you short of cash? If you are, I'll be satisfied with the interest for the time being.

STREPSIADES [*innocently*]: Interest? Could you tell me what that is?

SECOND CREDITOR: Why – it's simply – the fact that – well, if somebody owes you money, the debt keeps growing and growing, month by month, day by day, as time runs on.

STREPSIADES: Quite right. Now then: do you think the sea has any more water in it now than it used to?

SECOND CREDITOR: No, it's the same size; there would be something wrong if it wasn't.

STREPSIADES: Well, then, if the sea doesn't get any bigger as the rivers run into it, what business have you pretending that money grows as time runs on, or whatever you said? Go and chase yourself! Get out of my sight! Boy! fetch me a goad.

[*A slave runs and brings him one.*]

SECOND CREDITOR [*as STREPSIADES pricks him with the goad*]: Assault! Help! Witness, somebody!

STREPSIADES [*continuing to ply the goad*]: Gee up! What are you waiting for? Get along there, you gelding!

SECOND CREDITOR: Assault! And battery! Help!

STREPSIADES: Move! Move! Or else I'll stick this up your thoroughbred arse!

[*The CREDITOR takes to his heels.*]

Yes, I thought I'd get rid of you that way – you and your chariots and wheels and all.

[*STREPSIADES goes in, in a feasting mood. A short pause; then the music of the CHORUS's entrance-song is heard again, and they sing solemnly.*]

CHORUS:

Is he not in love with evil?
 See the way he tries to cheat
 Honest men who've lent him money -
 This he thinks a noble feat!

But before this day is ended
 He will sure be made distraught,
 And will make the great Professor
 Rue the wickedness he taught.

For his son's a rhetorician
 (Which is what his dad desired)
 Armed with Wrong to vanquish every
 Argument by Right inspired.

Brief, Strepsiades, the season
 Fate allows you to rejoice:
 Soon, yea, soon you will be praying
 For your son to lose his voice.

[Sounds of heated argument from the house, followed by a yell. STREPSIADES rushes out clutching his face and in extreme agitation; PHEIDIPPIDES follows him, looking totally unconcerned.]

STREPSIADES: Help, neighbours! Help, cousins! Help, Cicynians! I'm being assaulted! Rescue me! Zeus, my head! And look what he's done to my cheeks! *[To PHEIDIPPIDES]* You abominable villain, do you realize what you're doing hitting your father?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yes, I do.

STREPSIADES *[to the CHORUS]*: Do you hear him? He admits it!

PHEIDIPPIDES: Of course I do.

STREPSIADES: You're a disgusting young criminal.

PHEIDIPPIDES: More, more! I love being called that sort of thing.

STREPSIADES [*after a moment's thought*]: Sack-arse!!!

PHEIDIPPIDES: I do like these compliments.

STREPSIADES [*baffled*]: How dare you hit your father?

PHEIDIPPIDES: I was perfectly justified, and by Zeus, I'll prove it to you.

STREPSIADES: Justified! Hitting your father justified!

PHEIDIPPIDES: You argue your case, I'll argue mine, and I'll guarantee to prove it.

STREPSIADES: Prove it? Prove you're right to – ?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Easily. Now which of the Arguments do you want?

STREPSIADES: Arguments? What Arguments?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Forgotten already? Do you want Right or Wrong?

STREPSIADES: Well – if you can prove that it's right for a son to hit his father – then you certainly have been taught to defeat a just claim, as *I* wanted you to be. Hah!

PHEIDIPPIDES: I will all right, never mind; when you've heard me you won't have a word to utter against me.

STREPSIADES: I'll be very interested to hear what you have to say!

CHORUS:

Search hard for ways this argument to win.

The facts compel us to believe

The boy has something up his sleeve:

Observe the shameless frame of mind he's in!

LEADER:

Come, tell us what contention this domestic strife
upwhipped.

– Of course, you know your cue comes here, you saw it
in the script.

STREPSIADES: I'll explain right from the start, how it all began. You know I'd made a big dinner. Well, afterwards I just asked my son to take his lyre and sing something by Simonides – I asked for 'The Fleecing of Lamb-achus'.⁶²

And straight away, would you believe it, he says, 'That's so out of date – playing a lyre and singing while people are drinking – what do you think we're doing, grinding corn or something?'

PHEIDIPPIDES: And quite right too. I should have given you one right then and there, and I don't mean a song either. Telling me to sing! – who did you think you were entertaining, a gang of crickets?

STREPSIADES: Do you hear him? That's the sort of thing he was saying at the time – 'and Simonides is a rotten poet anyway', he added. Well, I could barely restrain myself – but I did. I asked him if he would at least take a myrtle branch in his hand⁶³ and recite some Aeschylus for me. That started him off again – 'Oh, Aeschylus is a prince among poets, to be sure – a prince of hot air and barbarous bombast. He doesn't use words, he uses bloody mountains.' Well, by this time he was making me shake all over, and my heart was thumping. But I bit my lip hard and said 'All right, you win. Give us something from one of your clever modern chaps.' So he launched straight into a speech by Euripides, something about a man, the gods preserve us, a man sleeping with his sister – his sister on both sides!⁶⁴ Well, I couldn't bear it any longer. I pitched into him, called him all sorts of things. Then, you know what happens, we started throwing names at each other. And in the end he jumps up and starts giving me a dusting, choking me, punching me, you name it, he did it.

PHEIDIPPIDES: And you deserved it. Carping at Euripides! He's a genius!

STREPSIADES: A genius? What do you mean, you – I'd better not say it, I'll only be hit again.

PHEIDIPPIDES [*unrelenting*]: And you'll deserve it again, by Zeus.

STREPSIADES: Deserve it indeed! Who was it brought you up from a baby, you impudent child? [*Softening with reminis-*

cence] I always understood from your babbling what it was you wanted. You had only to say 'broo' and I understood and gave you something to drink. When you cried 'mamma', there I'd be with a bit of bread. And the moment you said 'kakka', I'd grab you, take you outside, and hold you out where you could shit without messing the house up. [*Becoming wrathful again with another reminiscence*] And now what do you do, curse you? When you were throttling me, didn't I yell 'Here, watch it, I want to crap'? And did you take me outside? No, you just kept choking me, and then yelled at *me* because I did a kakka on the spot!

CHORUS:

We're all agog to hear the other side.

For if he proves it wasn't bad

For him to suffocate his dad,

Soon all young men will flay their elders' hide.

LEADER:

It's up to you, the modernist, to use your youthful thrust

To manage to persuade us that the things you did were just.

PHEIDIPPIDES: It's delightful to be acquainted with the wisdom of today, and be able to look down on convention. Do you know, there was a time when I thought about nothing but horses, and in those days I couldn't say three words together that made sense. But now my father has made sure that's all behind me. I'm intimate with all the new ideas and arguments, I can dance on the point of a needle. And I can prove that it's right for me to punish my father.

STREPSIADES: I wish you'd go back to your horses. Better for me you kept four of the damn things, rather than use your surplus energy hitting me.

PHEIDIPPIDES: As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted – yes, I want to ask you a question or two. When I was a child, did you hit me?

STREPSIADES: Yes, of course I did – for your good – because I loved you.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Very well. You hit me for my good. Therefore, if it's for one's good to be hit, it was right for me to take thought for *your* good and hit you. Why should you be immune from being hit, when I'm not? I'm a free man, just like you. As Euripides forgot to say, 'The son gets thumped, do you think the father shouldn't?'⁶⁵ You'll say, I know, that it's the universal practice that only children should be beaten. But I should remind you that it is also universally agreed that old age is second childhood. In fact, seeing one expects a higher standard of behaviour from the old than the young, it's only right that they should be more severely punished when they fall short.

STREPSIADES: But look at the laws! Can you name a city where the law allows you to do this to your father?

PHEIDIPPIDES: But what is a law anyway? It must have been made at some time, and made by a man just like you or me; and he must have persuaded his people by argument to accept it. Why shouldn't I now make a new law allowing sons to beat their fathers in return? I'll be generous; the times we boys got hit before the law was changed, we'll renounce all claim to compensation for them. You can treat them as a free gift. And again, look at chickens and so on. They actually fight their fathers. And what difference is there between them and us, except that they don't move resolutions?

STREPSIADES: Well, if you're so keen on a chicken's life, why don't you go the whole hog? Why don't you eat manure and sleep in a henhouse?

PHEIDIPPIDES: It's not the same thing, silly. Not according to Socrates it isn't.

STREPSIADES: Well, in that case you'd better not hit me. If you do you'll live to regret it.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Never!

STREPSIADES: Oh yes, you will. I've got the right to beat you now; but one day you may have a son, and you'll have the right to beat him, and what will you say if he quotes your new law against you?

PHEIDIPPIDES: That's all very well; but supposing I don't have a son? I'll have been thumped already, and won't be able to hit *anybody* back – and you'll be laughing all over your dead face!

STREPSIADES [*to a group of elderly men in the audience*]: I think he's right, you know, old chaps, I think he's got a point. It's only reasonable that if we do wrong we should suffer for it.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Here's another point.

STREPSIADES: I've had enough of them. Any more and I'll most likely be dead.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Oh, I don't know. All this may hurt you less than you think.

STREPSIADES: Why, what possible good can I get out of this behaviour of yours?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Easy. Mum's next on the list for bashing.

STREPSIADES: What?! This is really too much!

PHEIDIPPIDES: Suppose I prove to you, with the help of my invincible Argument, that it's right to hit one's mother as well? If I do that, what will you do?

STREPSIADES: If you do that, I'll be very happy to let you throw yourself off the Acropolis. And you can take Socrates and that precious Argument of yours with you. [*To the CHORUS*] Clouds, this is your fault. I put my all in your hands, and this is what you've done to me.

LEADER:

No, not our fault: you brought it on yourself,
By making love to evil crookery.

STREPSIADES: But why didn't you tell me at the time? You know I'm only a countryman, and an old man too. Why did you deceive me?

LEADER:

We do the same to everyone we see
Surrender to seductive wickedness,
Bringing him to disaster, so that he
May learn that Heaven's laws must be obeyed.

STREPSIADES: Ah, holy Clouds, your verdict's hard but just.
I shouldn't have tried to cheat my creditors out of their
money. You're right. [*To PHEIDIPPIDES*] My dear, dear
son – come with me and let's get that bloody Chaerephon
and Socrates for diddling us.

PHEIDIPPIDES: What! – show disrespect to my teacher?

STREPSIADES: Aye, aye: revere the great paternal Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Zeus! Where have you been all these years?
Does Zeus exist?

STREPSIADES [*defiantly*]: He does.

PHEIDIPPIDES: No, he doesn't. Awhirl is king now; he's
driven Zeus into exile.

STREPSIADES: That he hasn't. I only believed that because
those damn thinkers set my mind awirl.⁶⁶ Good gods – a
brainstorm I had – and I actually worshipped it!

PHEIDIPPIDES: I can't be bothered any longer with your
blethering. [*Goes into the house.*]

STREPSIADES: How mad I was! I let Socrates persuade me to
deny the gods! [*Addressing the statue of Hermes on a pillar
outside his house*] Hermes, don't be cross with me. Don't
destroy me. Forgive me – I was demented, I listened to too
much blether. Give me some advice. Should I prosecute
them, or what do you think? [*Pretending to see the statue
indicating dissent*] You're right. I shouldn't have thought of
trying to trip them in the courts. I'll go right off and burn
the blighters' school. Xanthias!

[*XANTHIAS, one of STREPSIADES' slaves, appears.*]

Fetch a ladder and a mattock, and come with me! And
somebody bring a lighted torch!

[*XANTHIAS and another SLAVE bring the articles requested.*]

Now, Xanthias [*pointing to the roof of the Thinkery*], get up there and take his roof off, if you love your master! Or better, throw it down on top of them!

[XANTHIAS *sets up the ladder, climbs on to the roof and gets to work.*]

Give me the torch; I'll make them pay for what they've done; not all their verbal wizardry will save them! [*He goes up the ladder. By now XANTHIAS has laid the roof-beams bare, and STREPSIADES proceeds to apply the torch to them.*]

FIRST STUDENT [*from inside*]: Hey! Hey! Help! Help!

STREPSIADES [*on the roof*]: Do your job, torch!

[CHAEREPHON *puts his head out of the school door. He is as white as a sheet, with enormous eyes, as if he has never seen daylight.*]

CHAEREPHON: What in heaven's name do you think you're doing?

STREPSIADES: Doing? Having an intellectual discussion with your roof-beams, of course.

SECOND STUDENT [*rushing out*]: Help! Who's burning our house?

STREPSIADES: Remember the last coat you pinched? That's who.

SECOND STUDENT: You'll burn us all alive!

STREPSIADES: That's just what I want to do – if my tools don't fail me, and if I [*looking apprehensively over his shoulder*] don't fall off and break my neck first.

SOCRATES [*coming out slowly and with dignity*]: You there on the roof, what are you doing?

STREPSIADES [*mimicking him*]: I am walking upon air and attacking the mystery of the sun.

SOCRATES [*coughing in the smoke*]: Help, I'm going to suffocate!

CHAEREPHON [*who is still inside*]: Help, I'm being prematurely cremated!

[CHAEREPHON and all the STUDENTS rush out of the school, and stand for a moment bewildered.]

STREPSIADES [*descending the ladder, followed by XANTHIAS*]:

No more than you deserved; people who cock snooks at the gods and argue about the back side of the moon must pay for it. [*Kicks SOCRATES in the backside.*] On them! Stones!

[SOCRATES and the rest take flight. STREPSIADES and his SLAVES pursue them with a volley of stones, STREPSIADES shouting]

Revenge! Revenge for the injured gods! Remember what they did! Revenge!

[*He continues shouting until he and the pursuers as well as the pursued have disappeared.*]

[*The LEADER waits to see if anyone else is going to appear, then turns to her colleagues.*]

LEADER:

Let's go: I think it's not unfair to say

Our choral work has not been bad today.

[*The CHORUS files out.*]

THE CLOUDS

1. Interest became due at the end of the month.
2. Literally, 'I should have had my eye knocked out with a stone', with an untranslatable pun on *ekkoptein*, 'to knock out', and *koppatias*, 'a horse branded with the letter koppa (Q)'.
3. For 'Coesyra' see note 55 to *The Acharnians*. The name Megacles is likewise suggestive of riches and high birth; it was the name of Pericles' great-grandfather.
4. In the original 'she weaved too closely', i.e. she was extravagant.
5. A hemispherical cover; the coal was placed underneath it.
6. One of Socrates' earliest and most fanatical followers. His pallor, here and elsewhere in Aristophanes, is due to his alleged aversion to fresh air.
7. The first Greek scientist, who lived at Miletus in Asia Minor in the early sixth century, and whose name had become a byword for scientific knowledge.
8. See Introductory Note to *The Acharnians*.
9. In certain territories conquered by Athens the land was confiscated and distributed in allotments to Athenian citizens; such a settlement was called a cleruchy. This had been done at Mytilene in 427.
10. Pericles led the expedition to Euboea which suppressed an anti-Athenian revolt there in 446.
11. In Sophocles' *Athamas* the hero, who had vowed to sacrifice his children, was almost sacrificed himself after they had escaped; he was actually led to the altar, wreathed as a victim, but was rescued by Heracles.
12. The mystic rites of Demeter and Persephone, celebrated at Eleusis and famous throughout Greece and beyond. Initiates of these Mysteries form the Chorus of *The Frogs*.
13. The writers of this form of lyric verse were proverbial for never talking sense. One of them, Cinesias (not the character in *Lysistrata*), actually gets up in the clouds in *The Birds* with his wares, but not for long.
14. Apparently this is Hieronymus (see note 33 to *The Acharnians*).
15. Unknown apart from the references in this play.
16. See note 11 to *The Acharnians*.
17. See note 16 to *The Acharnians*.

18. A scientist, philosopher and writer from the island of Ceos, who had acquired a considerable reputation even outside intellectual circles.
19. In the Greek the etymological point is based on the similarity of the words *brontē* (thunder) and *pordē* (a fart). I have had to adapt.
20. See note 21 to *The Acharnians*.
21. The Greek has 'at the Diasia', a major late-winter festival.
22. This trio may be sung to 'My eyes are fully open to my awful situation', from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Ruddigore*.
23. He is thinking of the cave of the oracle of Trophonius in Boeotia, where clients brought honey-cakes for the resident snakes.
24. 427 B.C., four years before the original production of *The Clouds*.
25. *The Banqueters* was produced for Aristophanes by Callistratus.
26. Electra, in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, found a lock of hair on her father Agamemnon's tomb, and recognized it as that of her brother Orestes, who had been abroad for many years.
27. This dance was frequently used in comedy, but was regarded as indecent in any other context.
28. A remarkable assertion in view of the final scene of the play!
29. See note 68 to *The Acharnians*. Hyperbolus' mother is attacked as a usurer in *The Poet and the Women*.
30. *Maricas* was produced in 421 – which shows that the revised version of *The Clouds* dates from later than that. Eupolis, Phrynichus and Hermippus were contemporary comic poets.
31. In *The Knights* Cleon had been compared to a man fishing for eels, who can only catch them by stirring up the mud.
32. Cleon was in the tannery business. He had been caricatured in *The Knights* as a slave from Paphlagonia ('Blusterland').
33. The moon was eclipsed late in 425 (actually some months before the election referred to).
34. Artemis.
35. The Athenian calendar was lunar, with months of twenty-nine or thirty days and a complete intercalary month every two or three years. Somehow or other, at this time, something had gone wrong and the month was not beginning, as it should, on the day of appearance of the new moon. In heaven, evidently, the calendar is regulated solely by the moon.
36. In the original the joke is not about feet but about fingers, since the word *daktylos* (dactyl) also means 'finger'.
37. Socrates recommends that the word *alektryon*, used for chickens of both sexes, should be replaced by *alektryaina* for the female and *alektor* for the male.
38. The word *kardopos* (a kneading-trough), in spite of its masculine-

- sounding ending, was grammatically feminine. Socrates says it would be more logical to call it *kardopē*.
39. Philoxenus is mentioned in *The Wasps* as a homosexual. Aristophanes does not actually use the name 'Alexander' but 'Ameinias' (see next note).
 40. In the original the point is that the vocative form of 'Ameinias' (see previous note) is 'Ameinia', which sounds like a woman's name.
 41. In the Greek 'Corinthians', with a pun on *koris* (a bug).
 42. Literally 'a cockchafer' which Greek children used in the same way.
 43. Strepsiades is confusing Socrates with Diagoras, a philosopher from the island of Melos, an atheist who mocked at all aspects of religion and in particular at the Eleusinian Mysteries, and was eventually outlawed (the decree of outlawry, with a reward of 6,000 drachmas to whoever kills Diagoras, is quoted by Aristophanes in *The Birds*). The implication, of course, is that Socrates too is an atheist.
 44. Pericles had once entered a large sum under this heading in his accounts, when in fact he had given it as a bribe to procure a Spartan withdrawal from Attica.
 45. Aristophanes probably intended to insert here a song for the Chorus.
 46. The chaining of Cronos, ex-king of the gods, by his son Zeus, was the classic instance used by philosophers and others seeking to prove the 'immorality' of traditional myth.
 47. See *The Acharnians* passim.
 48. The Greek mentions one Pandeletus, who according to an ancient commentator was a politician, but of whom nothing further is known.
 49. A lyre-player who flourished (in all senses) around 450. The comic poet Pherecrates describes him as having 'twelve notes on seven strings'.
 50. The Greek refers to the Dipolieia, an ancient festival of Zeus, which had never, like other festivals, been brought up to date with athletic, musical and literary competitions. Grasshopper brooches in the hair had gone out of fashion in the early fifth century. Ceceides was a poet, but we know nothing else of him.
 51. At the Panathenaea youths performed a ritual dance naked except for a standard heavy infantry shield.
 52. Perhaps the Antimachus of *The Acharnians* (see note 80 to that play), perhaps not.
 53. Warm springs were called 'Heraclean baths'.
 54. Actually only to one other person (Peleus, as a matter of fact); for Homer, moreover, the word in question (*agorētēs*) meant 'eloquent speaker' and had nothing to do with the market-place.

Notes

55. Peleus (who afterwards became the father of Achilles) got into a Potiphar's-wife situation with the wife of Acastus. Acastus, believing her accusation of attempted seduction, left Peleus naked among wild beasts, where he would have perished had not Hephaestus, knowing that it was Acastus' wife that had attempted to seduce Peleus, brought him a knife to defend himself.
56. Which, though remote and inhospitable, was at least rainless.
57. This was the day before the new moon, so called, presumably, because there was no moon and the day might have been regarded as belonging to either the outgoing or the incoming month.
58. This exchange may be sung to 'Oh, my adored one!' from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer*.
59. Carcinus was a tragic poet. He had four sons, three of them dancers (they performed in *The Wasps*) and the fourth, Xenocles, also a tragic poet, mentioned several times by Aristophanes, always with contempt.
60. From Xenocles' tragedy *Tlepolemus*.
61. 'Falling off a donkey' meant getting into a mess for which one had only oneself to blame.
62. In the Greek 'of Crius', whose name means 'ram'.
63. This was traditional at drinking parties when singing, and Strepsiades wanted his son to make at least a gesture to the tradition.
64. The speech will have been from Euripides' *Aeolus*. Euripides' portrayal of this incest is attacked again in *The Frogs*. The point of 'on both sides' is that brother and sister marriages were permitted if they were children of different mothers.
65. The actual quotation (from *Alcestis*) is, 'You want to live; do you think your father doesn't?', spoken by a father who has been asked by his son to die in his place; Pheidippides has thus turned it inside out.
66. In the original production it seems that there was a cup (*dinos*) on a pillar outside the Thinkery, symbolizing the new god Awhirl (Dinos). Strepsiades says, 'Awhirl hasn't driven Zeus out; I only believed that because of this cup (*dinos*). How could I have been so stupid as to worship a piece of pottery?'